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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4331
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003734

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE, NOV 9

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to Baghdad was the primary topic of conversation at the 9 November Iraq Executive Steering Committee (IESC) meeting. The Minister of Displacement and Migration spoke about the lack of capacity within his ministry to handle the return of IDPs to Baghdad, especially as improvements in the security situation have encouraged more people to return to homes they have fled. Other topics addressed include congestion on Baghdad's streets, political paralysis at the Council of Representatives, improvements in rail transport to Baghdad, and critical bridge repair coordination. End Summary.

Security improvements make streets safer, but more crowded

12. (C) Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki began the 9 November IESC meeting by stating that recent security improvements brought on by Operation Fardh al-Qanoon (FAQ) have encouraged many people to return to homes they fled due to violence and intimidation. He stated that it was critical for the government to ensure the delivery of essential services to these returnees in order to make their return permanent. He also noted that improved security in the city has brought more congestion to Baghdad's streets and implored the Mayor and the Governor to work with the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC) to identify areas where security barriers were no longer needed and checkpoints could be removed.

13. (C) Mayor Saber al-Esawi agreed that traffic congestion was a major problem in the city and agreed to coordinate with the BOC, noting that his office had previously generated a list of streets ready for barrier removal. He also stated that the Amanat (city hall) was preparing for an experiment in working night shifts in several districts, conducting municipal work from 10:00pm until dawn. General Abud, BOC Commander, agreed to coordinate with the Amanat on these initiatives, and stated his willingness to review the status of checkpoints in the city that could be stood down due to security improvements.

Improving services key to reconciliation efforts

14. (C) Former Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Ahmed Chalabi reported on the activities of his newly-formed Services Committee, stating that he and GEN Petraeus had recently visited the communities of Arab Jabour on the outskirts south of Baghdad in order to assess the needs of this rural area, where reconciliation efforts have raised expectations that government-provided services would improve. Dr. Chalabi also reported on several coordination meetings he held with various ministry officials, and criticized those who have not followed up on commitments to provide resources to rural areas such as Arab Jabour.

IDP returns central issue to Baghdad's future

15. (C) The issue of IDP returns was identified several times during the meeting as a critical challenge for the GoI to face, and as a reason for increased efforts in government service provision. Dr. Chalabi, General Abud and National Security Advisor Mufuwak al-Rubeiy each commented on the need for an effective government policy to facilitate the return of families who have fled their homes. NSA Rubeiy stated that IDP returns are both facilitated by, and generate a need for, improved government services. With the return of families to Baghdad's neighborhoods, there is a greater need for the schools, clinics, fuel deliveries and food distribution systems that those families need to remain in those neighborhoods. Dr. Chalabi said that roaming bands of orphans and homeless youths, the result of displacements, posed a significant threat to Baghdad's future, and the government must help bring stability to both Baghdad's neighborhoods and its families. The Prime Minister emphasized the political element of IDP returns, stating that returns indicated the failure of those who use forced displacement as a part of their political agenda.

16. (C) The Minister of Displacement and Migration said flatly that his ministry was not designed to cope with the current IDP problem in Iraq and lacked the legislative authority, the policy guidance and the administrative capacity to provide support to the thousands of families either displaced within Iraq, or hoping to return to Iraq from abroad. He stressed that his ministry currently serves in a critical coordination role between other ministries with more resources, such as the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, Education, Trade and Health and with organizations like the Red Crescent, but he needs a larger budget and more personnel to be more

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effective. The issues raised by the displacement, internal movement, emigration and immigration of so many families touch upon nearly every aspect of government services; the Minister stated that the coordinated effort of the entire Government of Iraq was needed to provide solutions for these families. Everyone agreed these issues needed greater consideration in future meetings.

The national parliament is 'paralyzed'

17. (C) IESC Political Committee Chairman Dr. Hachem al-Hassani launched into a criticism of the political parties at the Council of Representatives (CoR). Dr. Hassani, a CoR member, stated that political reconciliation in Iraq was being prevented by the paralysis of the national parliament and the unwillingness of the political parties to reach agreement on the crucial issues facing the nation. Dr. Hassani also warned about the debilitating effects of election cycles on politics, stating that 2009 would likely be a "dead year" for the government, as the parties would be focused more on their upcoming election fight than on running the country.

Rail improvements just the ticket for Baghdad

18. (C) The Minister of Transportation (MoT) provided an upbeat assessment of rail transport into Baghdad, much to the pleasure of the Ministers of Oil and Electricity; they depend heavily upon transportation assets to run their ministries and improvements in rail provide welcome alternatives to the pipelines and roadways that they are so dependent upon. The MoT thanked Coalition assistance for the greater security and support provided to Iraq's rail transport system.

Mayor praised for mending bridges

19. (C) Following up on previous IESC discussions on critical

bridge repair in Baghdad, the NSA directed the Mayor to continue coordination with the Ministry of Water Resources and the BOC on the repair of the 'pipe bridge' across the Tigris, one of many bridges serving Baghdad that are in need of repair. Changes to the river bed over the past thirty years have forced an alteration to the original plans to repair the bridge, and coordination is necessary to de-conflict the various repair designs. The Mayor was praised by the NSA for the efforts of the Amanat to reconstruct this key piece of infrastructure.

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